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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 001089

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: TAWASUL CONDUCTS TRAINING FOR WOMEN MAJLIS CANDIDATES

REF: A. MUSCAT 1087; B. MUSCAT 787

CLASSIFIED BY: L. Victor Hurtado, DCM, Department of State, Embassy
Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Prior to a government-sponsored symposium (Ref A) recommending training for women electoral candidates, local think tank Tawasul conducted a training session focused on women candidates for the 2011 Majlis al-Shura election. Held on November 8-10, this was the first of three training sessions, funded by the Dutch Embassy, which will cover designing, planning, and budgeting for election campaigns. In a lengthy article about the training in the English weekly "H!" on October 9, Khalid al-Haribi, the Managing Director of Tawasul said, "The failure of women candidates to reach the Shura Council in the last elections was expected. It has nothing to do about [women's] acceptance in society; it was the improper handling of their campaigns. Now, the candidates have to try different ways to reach their community, it is called 'political marketing,' and we need candidates in Oman to now effectively use it."

¶2. (C) Al Haribi told poloff that the training was extremely successful and that he had received positive feedback from participants. He noted that the Dutch Ambassador, who did not publicize funding of the event, was also pleased with the results.

¶3. (C) On September 17, International Republican Institute (IRI) Oman Country Director, Steve Pier, was asked to see the Minister of Social Development. Asking for strict confidentiality, she requested that he develop a proposal to train women for the next election for the Majlis al-Shura, for the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD)'s consideration. Pier indicated that the Minister wanted to include the proposal in a list of recommendations that would be the official outcome of the October women's symposium (Ref A). After Pier gave her the proposal, he did not hear anything further from the ministry. The women's symposium included discussion of the need for further training for women on elections, but did not include any specifics (Ref A). On November 23, Pier met with some of the Minister's staff at MoSD to discuss potential funding options for the proposed training. MoSD was considering funding all of the associated costs, or paying for all the programming costs and asking Pier to seek funding for the indirect costs, likely from the USG; although MoSD officials expressed concern about funding coming from the USG. In a conversation with Pier and Tawasul's al Haribi, Pier commented to poloff that every time there is publicity about Tawasul's training of women, MoSD calls him. He reassured al Haribi that "this is the way civil society is supposed to work, putting pressure on the government to do what needs to be done."

¶4. (C) Comment: Tawasul (Arabic for "connecting") has organized a variety of events promoting civil society and women's empowerment since its inception. Exploiting the relative freedom given to

commercial entities in Oman, Tawasul registered as a corporation, even though the work it conducts would be considered the purview of NGOs in most countries. This has allowed them to escape the bureaucracy and government control inherent in seeking permission from the MoSD for any activities that they plan or carry out, which is required of registered NGOs in Oman. As an effective indigenous local partner, Tawasul has facilitated a tremendous increase in programming this year in cooperation with some of our Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funded partners (Ref B).

15. (C) Comment (cont.): Previous attempts to provide women's candidate training through a MEPI funded grant to IRI met with failure, as the GoO would not approve the programs. The Embassy was directly and explicitly informed at the time that elections were out of bounds for foreign funding. The Dutch have been extremely discreet in their funding of this activity, which, in conjunction with Tawasul's commercial status, appears to be what has allowed this training to proceed. End Comment.
Schmierer